



## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Endangered Species Recovery Program

The ultimate goal of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) is the recovery (and subsequent conservation) of endangered and threatened species and the ecosystems on which they depend. A variety of methods and procedures are used to recover listed species, such as protective measures to prevent extinction or further decline, consultation to avoid adverse impacts of Federal activities, habitat acquisition and restoration, and other on-the-ground activities for managing and monitoring endangered and threatened species. The collaborative efforts of the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and its many partners (Federal, State, and local agencies, Tribal governments, conservation organizations, the business community, landowners, and other concerned citizens) are critical to the recovery of listed species.



As a result of these efforts, the ESA has been credited with saving many species from extinction, including the California condor, black-footed ferret, peregrine falcon, and our Nation's symbol, the bald eagle.

### What do we mean by recovery?

Recovery is the process by which the decline of an endangered or threatened species is arrested or reversed, and threats removed or reduced so that the species' long-term survival in the wild can be ensured. The goal of the ESA is the recovery of listed species to levels where protection under the ESA is no longer necessary.

### How does the Recovery Program work?

The FWS Recovery Program staff works with its many partners to take necessary measures to prevent extinction of species; prepares and coordinates implementation of recovery plans to ensure effective recovery actions; and implements actions to reverse the decline of listed species and expedite full recovery. Recovery plans—documents prepared for listed species that detail the specific actions needed for recovery—provide a blueprint for private, Federal, and State cooperation in the conservation of threatened and endangered species and their ecosystems. A plan may cover one or several species.

*The California Condor Recovery Program is built upon a foundation of private and public partnerships. The focus of the effort is the release of captively-reared condors to the wild to ultimately establish self-sustaining populations.*  
USFWS photo by Scott Frier

### How is species recovery achieved?

The recovery of many listed species cannot be accomplished solely on our National Wildlife Refuges, National Forests, National Parks, and other Federal lands because many species occur primarily or solely on private lands. Achieving recovery for most threatened and endangered species therefore requires cooperative conservation efforts on private lands.

To stabilize, recover, and ultimately delist endangered and threatened species, the FWS engages and encourages the participation of multiple stakeholders including all landowners who do or could provide key habitat for an endangered or threatened species. We work closely with other Federal agencies to ensure that their activities do not adversely impact a listed species and, whenever possible, aid a species' recovery.

### *Flexible management of threatened species*

Section 4(d) of the ESA allows us to establish special regulations for threatened (not endangered) species. These "4(d)" or "special rules" allow us to customize the protections of the ESA to match the needs of the species and people. The FWS develops 4(d) rules for threatened species whenever these rules provide effective conservation results. For example, a special rule was developed to benefit the Apache trout. Apache trout may be caught by anglers who attempt to catch other fish species. To accommodate this accidental capture, the rule allows Apache trout to be caught as long as they are returned to the water. The revenues generated from fishing in the waters inhabited by the Apache trout help promote conservation of the habitat.

### *Safe Harbor Agreements for private landowners*

The FWS is committed to enhancing opportunities for private landowners to participate in the conservation of listed and imperiled species. One example is the Safe Harbor program, which provides regulatory assurances to non-Federal landowners who voluntarily implement measures that contribute to the conservation of listed species on their lands. These Safe Harbor Agreements eliminate landowners' concerns that restoring habitat and allowing the return of listed species to their property might result in future land use restrictions under the ESA.

### *Grants to States, Territories, and private landowners*

The FWS also offers millions of dollars annually in grants for endangered species conservation and recovery. Private Stewardship grants are offered directly to private landowners; Cooperative Endangered Species Fund grants are offered to States and Territories for a wide array of voluntary conservation projects for candidate, proposed and listed species. These funds may in turn be awarded to private landowners and groups for conservation projects. For more on our grants programs, visit <http://endangered.fws.gov/grants/>.

### *Reintroducing species back into their historic range*

Re-establishing a threatened or endangered species in areas of its former range is often necessary so there are enough populations or individuals of the species to sustain recovery of the species. To lessen concerns against reintroductions because they may also bring restrictions on the use of private or public lands in the area, Congress added the provision for experimental populations under section 10(j) of the ESA. An experimental population is a geographically described group of reintroduced plants or animals that is isolated from other existing populations of the species. Species in experimental populations are considered to be threatened, regardless of the species' designation elsewhere in its range, allowing us to develop special rules under section 4(d) of the ESA.

For example, the gray wolf population that was reintroduced into the northern Rockies has fewer take prohibitions than listed populations elsewhere. Flexible management of this experimental population allows landowners and livestock producers to harass wolves that threaten livestock, and in some cases also allows these wolves to be killed by appropriate authorities if they prey upon livestock. These prescribed actions have reduced potential economic threats to ranchers while benefiting the recovering wolf population.

### *Recovery efforts occur throughout the FWS*

Many FWS programs are leading recovery efforts for species. Many of our National Fish Hatcheries are raising endangered or threatened species; many National Wildlife Refuges were established specifically to protect listed species and many other species. The Partners for Fish and Wildlife program offers technical and financial assistance to private landowners to voluntarily restore wetlands and other fish and wildlife habitats on their land. The Partners program emphasizes the reestablishment of native vegetation and ecological communities for the benefit of fish and wildlife in concert with the needs and desires of private landowners. Our Law Enforcement program focuses on potentially devastating threats to wildlife by investigating wildlife crimes, regulating wildlife trade, helping us understand and obey wildlife protection laws, and working in partnership with international, State, and Tribal counterparts to conserve wildlife resources.

### **Who else helps to recover species?**

The FWS has cultivated many recovery partnerships with the conservation community. For example, we established a national partnership with the Center for Plant Conservation to utilize their expertise in plant conservation. Founded in 1984, the Center is supported by a nationwide consortium of 29 botanical gardens and arboreta. With approximately one out of every 10 plant species in the United States facing potential extinction, the Center is the only national organization dedicated exclusively to conserving rare U.S. plants.

Another important conservation partnership has been established with the American Zoo and Aquarium Association. Zoos and aquaria are important partners in our propagation/reintroduction programs for many listed species, such as the Wyoming toad, Puerto Rican crested toad, Karner blue and Oregon silverspot butterflies, desert fishes, and American burying beetle. An added benefit of these recovery projects is the opportunity to educate millions of zoo and aquarium visitors about endangered species.

### **What are some examples of recovery efforts?**

Delisted in 2001 due to recovery, the Aleutian Canada goose has benefited from both habitat restoration and reintroduction into formerly occupied habitat; translocation of young bald eagles into formerly occupied habitat is one factor contributing significantly to eagle recovery; captive propagation has increased the numbers of whooping cranes and red wolves; and land acquisition and cooperation among the FWS and the States has protected important habitats for Houston toads and other amphibians, to cite a few examples.

### **Do recovery programs work?**

Yes. But recovery is a challenge that takes time. We are attempting to halt or reverse declines that in some instances have been more than 200 years in the making. Even in the face of a substantial increase in the number of species listed over the past decade, the recovery efforts of the FWS, other Federal agencies, States, Tribal governments, conservation organizations, businesses, and private landowners have successfully halted and reversed the decline of many listed species. Of all the species listed since 1968, less than one percent have been recognized as extinct, and subsequently removed from the list. The fact that 99 percent of listed species have not been lost speaks to the success of the ESA in conserving species that are at risk of extinction.

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